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IRISH FOLK-SONG

BY PHILLIPS BARRY, A.M.

ERIN is unique in the choice of an emblem for her people. The harp identifies the Irish as the music-folk of the world. The same nation that in the dark ages bore aloft the lamp of learning, made their island home the century-long refuge of the Muse, who elsewhere had scarce where to lay her head. Nor have the evil days upon which the fates of Ireland have fallen — not century-old oppression and repression — availed to still her song. It lives as something imperishable, and in its charm quite irresistible. One cannot in so many words say why, though one feels it to be true, that in an Irish air is something strangely beautiful and fascinating. Witness the charm of "The Last Rose of Summer" as world-famous singers have rendered it. To know fully and to realize the wonder of the music of Eire, one must not go to printed books. Little enough there is, in fact, of genuine Irish music to be found elsewhere than in the recently published collections of traditional tunes and songs.¹ One can best go to the singers themselves, the people who cannot read a note of music, and who neither know nor care more for the lore of scales, modes, or technique than do the winged minstrels of wood and meadow, whose melodies alone rival theirs. And if one listen to the folk-singer awhile, one cannot but love the Muse of Eire, and confess that Goldsmith was right.²

Aside from the fact of its beauty, however, the folk-song of Ireland — and by folk-song is meant the wedded word and melody — merits closer study, as revealing the cardinal difference between art-song and folk-song. We are accustomed to lay a great deal of stress on the matter of origin as furnishing the criteria of difference that every one feels to exist;³ yet when we confine ourselves to credible evidence based on facts, we discover how minor a consideration is the mere

¹ C. V. Stanford, *The Complete Petrie Collection of Irish Music*; P. W. Joyce, *Ancient Irish Music, Old Irish Folk-Music and Songs*; F. and J. O'Neill, *Music of Ireland*; P. Barry, *Irish Come-All-Ye's*, *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, No. 86; *Journal of the Irish Folk-Song Society*.

² O. Goldsmith, Third Essay, ed. 1765, p. 14. "The music of the finest singer is dissonance to what I felt when our old dairy-maid sung me into tears with 'Johnny Armstrong's Last Good-Night' or 'The Cruelty of Barbara Allen.' "

³ The difference, namely, that is the test of the inimitability of folk-song. Kipling and Foster are good imitators, yet neither has produced more than an imitation. No one can deny, of course, that certain individual folk-songs, as far as the words are concerned, may go back to actual communal composition. This, however, does not make them folk-songs.

accident of origin. Folk-song is folk-song, because it *has become* the property of the folk in the widest sense of the word. However capricious the folk may be in its preference of one song to another, it treats all alike the individuals of its own, impressing on all the effects due to the free exercise of the unconsciously or subconsciously exerted fancy and genius of the singer, whose name is legion. Whereas the singer of "My Rosary" or "The Lost Chord" is in duty bound to reproduce with exact fidelity the words and notes of the archetype, no such injunction is laid on the singer of "Siubhal a Ruin" or "The Little Red Lark." He is left free, according as the inspiration of singing may lead him, to roam with the multitude of his kind through the devious paths of communal re-creation. Art-song is static; folk-song is dynamic. The former ends where it begins; the latter begins where it ends. The truth of this seemingly paradoxical statement is in the fact that folk-song is in reality an idea, of which we can get but the process of actualization, traceable as a history.

This conception of folk-song will constitute my point of departure in the present essay, wherein a number of come-all-ye's lately recorded by me, as sung in Boston and elsewhere, together with certain Irish airs from an unpublished manuscript of Dr. Henry Hudson, are printed for the first time.¹

PART I. ANCIENT BALLADS

I. LADY ISABEL AND THE ELF-KNIGHT (Child, 4)

She mount-ed on her milk-white steed, And led the bou - ny gray, And she
reached her fa-ther's lof - ty tower, Three hours be - fore it was day.

1.

She cast him about the middle so small,
She threw him into the salt, salt sea.

2. She mounted on her milk-white steed,
And led the bonny gray,
And she reached her father's lofty tower,
Three hours before it was day.

3.

"Oh, where have you been, pretty Polly,
So long before it was day?"

¹ The manuscript is in the Allen A. Brown Collection in the Boston Public Library. It is in five volumes, and contains 870 airs collected by Dr. Hudson from singers in Ireland, together with a number of his own compositions. In the case of a few items only, are the words as well as the melody given. Date, about 1840.

4. "Oh, hold your tongue, you prattling bird,
And tell no tales on me,
And your cage shall be of the beaten gold,
Instead of the ivory!"¹

"Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight" is a great favorite with the folk-singers of Eire. The accompanying, more complete version is worthy of comparison.

PRETTY COLENDEE

1. "Mount up, mount up, my pretty Colendee,
Mount up, mount up!" said he,
"And I will take you away to the far Scotland,
And there I'll marry thee, thee, thee,
And there I'll marry thee."
2. She mounted upon her little pony brown,
And he rode the dapple gray,
And they rode and rode through the merry green woods
Till they came to the side of the sea.
3. "Light off, light off, my pretty Colendee,
Light off, light off!" said he,
"For six kings' daughters I have drowned here,
And the seventh you shall be!"
4. "Oh, turn your back, Lord Mullen," she said,
"And walk close to the sea,
That I may have a moment to pray,
For the Lord to save poor me!"
5. He bowed and smiled sarcastically,
And walked close to the sea,
She quickly knelt and humbly prayed,
"Oh, Lord, do strengthen me!"
6. Then summing all her courage up,
Said, "Lord, I trust in Thee!"
And picked him up most manfully,
And threw him into the sea.
7. "Oh, hand me your hand, my pretty Colendee,
And help me out of here,
And I'll take you away to the far Scotland,
And there I'll marry thee!"
8. "Lie there, lie there, you false-hearted wretch,
Lie there in place of me,
For if six kings' daughters you have drowned here,
The seventh drowned thee!"
9. She mounted upon her little pony brown,
And led the dapple gray,
And rode till she came to her father's palace,
Just three long hours before day.

¹ "Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight," L, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. Words and melody recorded from the singing of E. A. S., Boston, Mass., native of County Down, Ireland.

10. "Now hold your tongue, my pretty Polly,
And tell no tales on me,
And your cage shall be lined with pure yellow gold,
And hung in the willow tree!"¹
 11. Her father awoke all in a fright,
And unto his daughter did say,
"Why is it, my dear Colen," he said,
"You have rose so long before day?"
 12. "Oh, the cat she came to my cage window door,
And threatened to devour me,
And (I) called up my pretty Colendee,
To drive the cat away."²

2. CAPTAIN WEDDERBURN'S COURTSHIP (Child, 46)

Oh, what is round-er than the ring, What's high - er than the
tree, What is worse than wom-an-kind, What's deep-er than the
sea? The globe is round-er than the ring, Heaven's high-er than the
tree, The dev - il's worse than wom - an - kind, Hell's
So you and I in one bed lie, And

1 2

deep - er than the sea. you'll lie next the wall.

¹ Another Irish version (K, from M. A. K., Boston, Mass.) has the curious variant.—

"Oh, hush, oh, hush, my bonny parrot,
Oh, hush you must for me,
To-day you got but one handful of grots,
To-morrow you shall have three!"

² "Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight," E., *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States.* MS. of M. J. P., Peoria, Ill., native of Fulton, Mo.

2. "
 Three questions you must answer me,
 Before you lie in my bed, at either stock or wall!"
3. "What is rounder than the ring, what's higher than the tree,
 What is worse than womankind, what's deeper than the sea?"
 "The globe is rounder than a ring, Heaven's higher than the tree,
 The devil's worse than womankind, Hell's deeper than the sea!"
4. "
 So you and I in one bed lie, and you'll lie next the wall!"
5. "What bird sings best, what flower blooms first, and where the dew
 first falls?
 Before I lie one night with you, at either stock or wall!"
 "The thrush sings best, the heath blooms first, and there the dew first
 falls,
 So you and I in one bed lie, and you'll lie next the wall!"
6. "For my breakfast you must get me a bird without a bone,
 The cherry without a stone, the bird without a gall,
"
7. "The dove it is a gentle bird, it flies without a gall,
 When the cherry is in the blossom, I'm sure it has no stone,
 When the bird is in the egg, I'm sure it has no bone,
 So you and I in one bed lie and you'll lie next the wall!"
8. "You must get to me some winter fruit that in December grew,
 You must get to me a silk mantle that west did ne'er go through,—
 A priest unborn, to make us both in one,
 Before I lie one night with you, at either stock or wall!"
9. "My father has some winter fruit that in December grew,
 My mother has a silk mantle that west did ne'er go through,
 Melchisedek's a priest unborn, and he'll make us both in one,
 So you and I in one bed lie, and you'll lie next the wall!"¹

Two melodies to "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship" may be found in the Petrie Collection.² A charming air recorded by Dr. Hudson further attests the acquaintance of Irish singers with this ballad.³

¹ "Captain Wedderburn's Courtship," A, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. Words and melody recorded as sung by E. A. S., Boston, Mass., native of County Down, Ireland. The singer prefers the arrangement of partial melodies as here printed, allowing for the repetition as a common refrain, of the line "So you and I in one bed lie, and you'll lie next the wall."

² Petrie, Nos. 777, 778.

³ The theme is an ancient one. Pelops and David are among the literary forebears of William Dixon.

THE DUKE OF RUTLAND'S DAUGHTER¹

Of interest also, as showing the wide currency of the ancient ballad in Ireland, are the following airs, likewise from the Hudson manuscript.

(1) LADY ANNISBEL ("Lord Lovell," Child, 75)²**Mixolydian.**(2) OH, STOP YOUR HAND, LORD JUDGE ("The Maid freed from Gallows," Child, 95)³**Mixolydian.**

PART II. LATER BALLADS

I. POLLY OLIVER

Mixolydian.

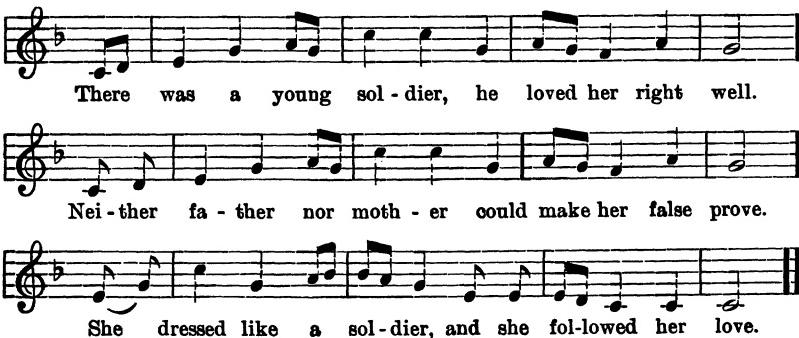
Down in the west coun - try, Pret - ty Pol - ly did dwell.

¹ Hudson MS., No. 704, with the first line of the words,—

"The Duke of Rutland's daughter walked out the fields so green."

² Hudson MS., No. 336.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 355.



1. Down in the West country, pretty Polly did dwell,
There was a young Soldier, he loved her right well,
Neither father nor mother could make her false prove,
She dressed like a soldier, and she followed her love.
2. It was early next morning pretty Polly arose,
She dressed herself up in a suit of men's clothes,
And off to her true love away she does go,
On her father's best charger like a trooper did ride.
3. She rode all alone, till she came to the town,
Where then she put up at the sign of the Crown,
The first that came in was a good English Lord,
And the next was the Captain, pretty Polly's true love.
4. She handed him a letter from under her glove,
Saying, "Here is a letter from Polly, your love,
And under the seal, there's a guinea to be found,
That you and your men may drink Polly's health round."
5. Pretty Polly being drowsy, she hung down her head,
She ordered a candle to light her to bed,
"I've a bed," said the Captain, "where I lie at my ease,
And you may lie with me, countryman, if you please."
6. "For to lie with the Captain is a dangerous thing,
And I, a poor soldier, must fight for my King,
I must fight for my King, by land, sea, and shore,
Here's a health to pretty Polly, such girls I adore!"
7. Early next morning, pretty Polly arose,
And dressed herself up in a suit of her own clothes,
And off to the Captain away she does go,
Saying, "Here's your Polly from Carlow, and royal true love!"
8. Now Polly has got married and lives at her ease,
She goes out when she wills, and comes in when she please,
She has left her old parents in grief for to mourn,
He'd give hundreds and thousands for Polly's return.¹

¹ "Polly Oliver," D, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. Sung by E. A. S., Boston, Mass., native of County Down, Ireland.

2. THE LOVE TOKEN¹(1)²(2)³

1. I was once to a nobleman's wedding,
'T was of a young damsel that had proved unkind,
And when she began to think of that wedding,
Her former true love ran through her mind.
2. The wedding supper being over,
Every one was to sing a song,
The first that began was her old true lover,
And unto her did the song belong.
3. "Love, here is a ring that once was broken,
You broke it in two on yonder plain,
You gave it to me as a true lover's token,
And now I'll return it back again."
4. The young bride sat at the head of the table,
And every line she marked right well,
At length and at length she could bear it no longer,
Down at the bridegroom's feet she fell,

¹ Melodies in Petrie, No. 491-5; also Joyce, *Old Irish Folk-Music*, No. 413; a Missouri version of the words, in *Popular Song in Missouri* (H. M. Belden, *Herrig's Archiv*, vol. cxx, pp. 70-71). Professor Kittredge informs me the ballad is current in the South.

² Hudson MS., No. 697, with the first stanza as follows:—

"Last night I went to a noble fine wedding,
The fair maid, she prov'd unkind,
And then she began to think of her losses,
Her former true love still running in her mind.

Chorus.

And then she began to think upon her losses,
Her former true love still running in her mind.

³ "The Love Token," A, *Folk-Songs of the North Atlantic States*. From MS. of P. D., aged 80, South Windham, Me. 1907.

5. Saying, "Kind sir, one wish I ask you,
It is that this boon you'll crave to me,
That I this night may lie with my mammy,
To-morrow night I'll lie with thee!"
6. No sooner said than it was granted,
She went weeping and sighing to her bed,
So early, early the very next morning,
They woke and found the young bride dead.

This ballad is one of a large number based on the familiar theme of "The Returned Lover," which exists in popular tradition in many different forms. Though not by any means absent from the ancient ballad, it is a theme much more in evidence in later balladry. Possibly "The Love Token" may be a relic of an ancient ballad now extinct.¹

Whereas space admits not of printing more than a few of the Hudson airs, the following, as characteristically Irish, will not admit of omission:—

(1) WILLY RILEY²

Mixolydian.



(2) JOHNNY DOYLE³

Aeolian.



One may note, as special features of Irish music, the peculiar arrangement of the partial melodies,⁴ and the Irish cadence, being the thrice-

¹ See my article, "A Garland of Ballads," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxiii, No. 90.

² Hudson MS., No. 275.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 436.

⁴ See my article, "Folk-Music in America," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxii, No. 83.

repeated closing note, wonderfully effective to the ear when a melody of this sort is played or sung. It may not be too much to say that herein appears to lie one of the more mechanical means, at least, by which the Muse of Eire is able so irresistibly to charm us. The Irish cadence is also found in certain Scotch airs; notably, "Bonny Dundee." This is, however, probably but evidence of Irish origin.

To Irish folk-singers, at least in the Northern States, we owe the presence of a large part of the folk-song current in this country. The actual amount is furthermore being steadily increased. Every ship-load of Irish immigrants brings its quota of folk-singers. Yet very few Irish songs have become Americanized,—due doubtless to the exile's love of his native country. Two, however, are notable exceptions. Of these, one, a song of the camp, entitled "The Unfortunate Rake," is in its original form, as found on Such broadsides, too vulgar to reprint here. Joyce traces it in Ireland as far back as 1790.¹ In its re-created, Americanized form, it is well known from Pennsylvania westward and southward as "The Cowboy's Lament," purged of unpleasant matter.² The other song is as follows:



- I. "Madam, I have come to court ye,
If your favor I could gain,
If you highly entertain me,
I will surely call again.

¹ *Old Irish Folk-Music*, No. 442; also Hudson MS., No. 566.

² A remarkable instance of communal re-creation.—

THE UNFORTUNATE RAKE (Such broadside)

"Muffle your drums, play your pipes merrily,
Play the dead march, as you go along,
And fire your guns right over my coffin,
There goes an unfortunate lad to his home."

THE COWBOY'S LAMENT (J. A. Lomax, *Cowboy Songs*, p. 75)

"Then swing your rope slowly, and rattle your spurs lowly,
And give a wild whoop as you carry me along,
And in the grave throw me, and roll the sod o'er me,
For I'm a young cowboy, and I know I've done wrong."

Re-creation in America has replaced the coarse vices of the dissolute soldier with the plainsman's less offensive weakness for poker and whiskey.

Chorus

With my 20, 18, 16, 14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, and 1,
With my 19, 17, 15, 13, 11, 9, 7, 5, 3, and 1.

2. "Madam, I have gold and silver,
 Madam, I have house and land,
 Madam, I have worldly treasures,
 "
3. "What care I for your gold and silver,
 What care I for your house or land,
 What care I for your ships on the ocean,
 All I want's a nice young man."
4. "Round about the wheel of fortune,
 It goes round and wearies me,
 Young men's ways are so uncertain,
 Sad experience teaches me!"¹

This is apparently the original of "The Quaker Courtship," current in many different versions, one of which, never before printed, may here be included for comparison.²

Mixolydian.

1. "Molly dear, I've come a-courting,
 Hum, hum, hi-ho-hum!
 'T is for labor I'm now sporting,
 Hum, hum, hi-ho-hum!"
2. "I want none of your love nor money,
 Hi-d-le linktum, hi-o-a,
 I want a man will call me 'Honey,'
 Hi-d-le linktum, hi-o-a."
3. "Here's a ring cost forty shillings,
 Thee may have it, if thee's willing!"
4. "I want none of your rings nor money,
 I want a man will call me 'Honey'!"³

¹ Sung by S. C., Boston, Mass., native of County Tyrone, Ireland.

² Sung by R. B. C., Newbury, Vt.

³ See also my article, "Some Traditional Songs," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, Jan., 1905, pp. 55-56.

Of the actual amount of Irish folk-music in circulation, it is impossible to form more than a very cautious estimate. Allowing for the possibility that in Boston alone are several hundred folk-singers,¹ each with an average repertory of twenty-five songs, it appears that the total number of melodies current in our midst may run high into the thousands. Extended research would certainly bring notable results,—illuminative too, if one would know more of the origin of folk-music in general.² This, however, is the least motive. One should seek, not to be instructed, but to be delighted; and though, to the world at large, Irish folk-music remains still much as a light hidden under a bushel, two Irish airs have been sung all over the globe. The one is our own "Yankee Doodle," derived from the same source as the melody known in Ireland under the title "All the Way to Galway,"³ the other is the well-known hymn-tune, "Bethany," a set of the air to which Thomas Moore wrote "Oft in the Stilly Night."⁴ So much, at least, the world owes to the Muse of Eire.

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¹ Every singer of a folk-song is a folk-singer. E. R. (Sligo) sings twenty-five; E. A. S. (Down), over fifty; S. C. (Tyrone), about forty.

² See my article, "The Origin of Folk-Melodies," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, vol. xxiii, pp. 440-445.

³ Petrie, No. 849; also Hudson MS., No. 405.

⁴ Except for two measures, the difference between the hymn-tune and the familiar set of "Oft in the Stilly Night" is far less than the difference between the latter and a set of the same melody in O'Neill's *Music of Ireland* (No. 219)—scarce more than a difference of key and association.